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ABSTRACT

The author contends that marriage counselors must be aware of the changing roles for women and the implications those changes have for contemporary marriage counselors. He presents an historical overview of the American woman's place in society, followed by a review of her status today. He also examines women's place in the social and helping professions, and elaborates some of the implications these changing roles have for today's marriage counselors. (Author/HMV)

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Changing Roles For Women: Implications for Marriage Counselors[1]

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Marriage counseling focuses primarily upon the male-female relationship within the marital dyad. Many counselors have stressed that this relationship, in and of itself, is "the" client. The marital dyad in this conceptulization may be viewed primarily as a closed system. Inputs that affect one part of the system automatically produce changes in other parts of the system. Inputs into the marital dyad system come from a wide variety of sources. Here we shall primarily concern ourselves with two major sources of inputs; first, those coming from the broader society that the couple exists within and, second, from marriage counselors. A historical overview of American womens' place in society will be sketched, followed by a review of their contemporary status. Womens' place in the social and helping professions will be examined and the conclusion will focus on the implications that changing roles for women have for contemporary marriage counselors. For brevity, the paper will concentrate on changes for women but it must be kept in mind that a basic law in nature is that for every action there is a reaction. Hence, any change for women - in society at large, in the professions, and in marital dyads - implies changes for men also. These implications must ultimately receive equal attention from marriage counselors.

Roles of Women in Early American Life

In Colonial America, women were very clearly subordinate to men in the eyes of the legal system. When women married, they suffered "civil death." They had no rights to property, even if they had inherited the property or received it as part of a dowry. They enjoyed no legal existence separate from their husbands. They could not sign legal contracts or make their own wills. They had no title to their own earnings. They had no rights to their children in cases of legal separation. They could not be sued in their own name and could not inherit property. They could be granted a divorce only for the most blatant abuses of the

marital contract, such as adultry, desertion, nonsupport, and extreme cruelty. (Flexner, 1971, p. 98) If women wished to make direct changes in these legal restrictions, their efforts were effectively stymied for they did not have the right to vote. Male legislatures, elected by male voters, made the laws that were enforced by male public officials.

Many women commenced life in the Colonies as either slaves or identured servants. Slaves could rarely - if ever - gain their freedom while the identured servants, at least theoretically, could gain their freedom after completing their required years of servitude. In the Virginia Colony between 1619 and 1690, women were sold in exchange for their transportation west, sometimes with their own consent. Hence women were often regarded as commodities - not as persons.

At this time in the country's beginnings, women's place was clearly in the home. Her master, as a child, was her father - as an adult, her husband. She performed the domestic chores, bore and raised her husband's children, and frequently died at a relatively young age from complications of childbirth.

Early Colonial women were permitted few roles outside of the home beside nursing the sick. If their husbands were tradesmen, conducting their businesses in their homes, there was no clear distinction between women's productive and domestic functions. The advent of the Industrial Revolution during the 19th Century, however, brought many changes to American family life - for both men and women. Perhaps the biggest impact came not from the Industrial Revolution, per se, but from the separation of the domestic and economic roles of the male heads of households. (Fullerton, 1972, p. 9) Men increasingly left their homes to go into factories to work. The man working at home, at his trade or on his farm, might have occasionally assisted his wife with various of her domestic chores - and she might likewise have helped him with his work. However, once he left his home every day to work at factory jobs, the division of labor between husbands and wives became

increasingly distinct. Women's roles continued to be that they should stay home to bear and raise the children. The increasing industrialization of the United States, especially in the North and the East, also resulted in a population shift from rural farm areas to the cities where factory work was available, further increasing the distinction between "men's work" and "women's work."

Sociologists suggest that the occupation of a male is the primary basis for the placement of the family in the social structure of a given community, at least in Patriarchal societies like the United States has been. Women, therefore, have been relegated to the status of housewife and received their placement in society in accordance with their husband's status. "Housewife" thus has become a kind of "pseudo-occupation" and women receive their public identity second hand from their husbands.(Fullerton, 1972, p. 15) Many would postulate there has been little change in this fact, up to and including the present time, for the majority of American women.

Women, in spite of their inferior legal role in Colonial times, were not entirely passive about this state of affairs. In Boston, Anne Hutchinson challenged the political system which prohibited women from having any voice in church matters. (Flexner, 1971, pp. 9-10) In Puritan New England, Church and State were virtually indistinguishable, so being barred from power in one effectively barred power in both. The explanation given women was that the Christian Bible clearly taught that women were inferior to men and subordinate to their will.

Organized religion, working hand in hand with the political affairs of state - as it had been doing for centuries in the Western World - was one of the major social forces that sought to keep women in their place, i.e., the home. St. Augustine declared that women were not made in the image of God. St. Thomas Acquinas defined women as "misbegotten males." Martin Luther taught that "God created Adam lord over all living creatures but Eve spoiled it all." (Daly, 1972) Women have long been directed by Western religions to be fruitful and to multiply. Women were denied not only positions of power and authority in ecclesiastical matters,

but were taught to submit to male dominance as their "Christian duty" - teachings which remain dominent in some religious groups even today.

In the field of education in early America, women suffered similar indignities. At best, they were permitted to obtain formal schooling into the elementary grades and sometimes the secondary ones. Colleges were established fairly early in the Colonies but it was the middle of the Nineteenth Century before even a few Eastern colleges began to accept female students. Eventually, elementary teaching came to become an acceptable field for women to work in but not until male school masters had exclusively filled this role for many decades.

By the middle of the Nineteenth Century, however, women were beginning to make their influence, feelings, and demands heard more clearly. Susan B. Anthony, a noted worker for women's rights, started a feminist newspaper, the "Revolution." The masthead of this paper read "Men, their rights and nothing more. Women their rights and nothing less." (Tanner, 1971, p. 29) The first Women's Rights Convention in the United States was held in Seneca Falls, New York in July, 1848. (Tanner, 1971, pp. 19-20) Men objected so strongly to this gathering that they locked the meeting hall to prevent entry. The women broke in, held their convention, and adopted a "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions." In the next decade several more meetings were held and by 1850 the woman's movement had spread as far west as Wisconsin and Kansas. These early feminists faced the task of not only getting men to change their minds but also getting women to be more conscious of their plight. Elizabeth Cady Stanton declared in 1856: "We may continue to hold our conventions; We may talk of our right to vote, to legislate, to held property, but until we can arouse in women a proper self respect, they will hold in contempt the demands we now make for our own sex. We shall never get what we ask for until the majority of women are openly with us; and they will never claim their civil rights until they know their social wrongs." (Tanner, 1971, p. 77)

In the middle of the Nineteenth Century, in 1860, Susan B. Anthony summarized

the status of women when she wrote: "By law, public sentiment, and religion, from the time of Moses down to the present day, woman has never been thought of other than a piece of property, to be disposed of at the will and pleasure of man." (Tanner, 1971, p. 102)

Here and there, however, cracks began to appear in the barriers to equality for women. In 1848 Maria Mitchell was elected to membership in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 1850 she was also elected to the Association for the Advancement of Science. In 1873 she was one of the founders of the Association for the Advancement of Women. In 1879 Belva Lockwood became the first woman lawyer to be admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court. (Flexner, 1959) In the 1860s the Cigarmaker's Union and, later in that decade, the Printers Union began to admit female members into the ranks of organized labor. By the end of the Nineteenth Century, in spite of these advancements, married women were still primarily confined to the home. In 1890 only four and one-half percent of married American women worked outside of their homes. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1960) In 1969, by contrast, 55% of married American women with children under the age of 18 and with a husband living at home were employed. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1974) These changes proceeded slowly, and it was not until the severe labor shortages of the 1940s, during World War II, that women became truely entrenched in the general labor market.

Changing Roles for Women in the Twentieth Century

Many changes occurred for women in the legal sphere in the first half of the Twentieth Century. Perhaps one of the most significant of these changes was their receiving the right to vote with the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1920. The right to vote extended to women the ability to directly influence legislation and political affairs. New Deal legislation of the 1930s brought many changes for all American citizens. The Social Security Act, with its financial

protection for survivors and for older persons, lessened millions of womens' dependence upon charity or relatives for survival. Legislation affecting working hours and conditions for women reduced the "sweatshop" working conditions that so many of them were laboring under, although much of this legislation was later viewed as unfairly restricting female employment. While equal pay for equal work between men and women theoretically came into being during World War II, it was rarely effectively enforced. The 1960s saw numerous changes in laws and regulations, especially by the Federal government, that paved the way towards greater sexual equality for women in the labor market. In 1962 President Kennedy ordered the Federal civil service system to stop discriminating against female employees. The 1963 Equal Pay Act and the 1964, Title VII Civil Rights Acts, continued this trend. By 1967 women were authorized to be promoted to General or Admiral in the Armed Forces, ranks previously open only to males.

In spite of these new laws, Presidential Orders, and changed regulations, however, the nation gradually learned, as it did in the field of equal rights for racial minorities, that it is one thing to legislate changes that deeply affect citizens' values and biases but quite another matter to actually effect change in these areas. Sexual equality in employment was no exception to this. In 1972 Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act was amended to put teeth into enforcing sexual equality. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission was given power to bring violators to court. Women in executive, professional, and administrative positions now received protection that they had hither to been denied. Thus, by 1974, the legal right for women to work and to receive equal pay had been largely won. Enforcing these rights remains a problem, however.

Attitudes towards women working outside of their homes are just as central to our concerns as are legal changes. The Gallup Poll has studied how people feel about women working when their husbands can adequately support them. In 1937 Gallup found 18% of Americans favoring wives working outside of their homes and 72% opposing

this. By 1969 this had shifted to the extent that 55% of Americans approved of married women's employment while those opposing this had shrunk to 40%. (Erskine, 1971)

Since 1920 the number of women in the U.S. work force has almost doubled. Today they constitute one-third of our labor force. (Brown, 1972) Wages still remain unequal and the annual full time earnings of American women today is only about three-fifths of that of men. Day care facilities for children of employed mothers are increasing but they remain in scarce supply. By 1971, 65% of the 20 million American working women were living with their husbands or children or both. 31% of these working women had children of preschool age and 52% had school age children. (Mandle, 1971) These figures strongly suggest that the ancient values which held that womens' place was (solely) in the home are no longer keeping them there.

The shift from being "just a housewife" to being a significant wage earner would imply a shift towards greater power in decision making within the marital dyad on the part of women. This may be occurring for some, yet, for most couples, power is primarily related to social class - and class placement is structurally predetermined in favor of men because of the differential training they receive and the expectations that are placed upon them. Women still take the male's name when they marry and the male's job largely determines his wife's place of residence and social status. The higher a male's occupational prestige, the greater voice he has in family decisions. Higher male income and greater educational achievement for men also add to American males continuing to possess greater power than women in marital dyads.

While this section has primarily stressed legal and economic changes for women, attention should also be paid to at least one technological development that has fundamentally altered the role of women in American life - improvements in birth control. The old adage that "biology is destiny" began to lose much of its strength

when conception was effectively brought under control in the Twentieth Century. Improvements in the condom and the diaphram, followed by the development of the pill, the IUD, and better surgical techniques for sterilization and abortion, have all combined to release women from compulsory motherhood. These technological advances, coupled with decreased religious influences and with legal changes making birth control and abortion available to most adults, have changed sexual intercourse from a primarily procreative function to a recreational and affectional matter. The U.S. birth rate has been falling since 1957 and in many areas has reached bare population replacement levels. Now that motherhood is at least theoretically optional, women have tremendously increased their potential to more equally compete with men - from the bedroom to the labor market. The nation is only beginning to observe the "no child marriage" as a viable, positive option for marital pairs. The pioneering works of Kinsey, (1948, 1953) and of Masters and Johnson, (1966, 1970) have also contributed to a new sexual equality that humans have never before experienced. These combinations of technological, legal, religious, attitudinal, and behavioral changes in the area of human sexual behavior suggest that male-female sexual relationships in the last quarter of the Twentieth Century will continue to shift as couples begin to more fully utilize the benefits of these advancements in their interpersonal relationships.

Women in the Social Sciences and Professions

We shall now direct our attention to those fields of endeavor that are directly concerned with the knowledge and training of marriage counselors. Marriage counselors have drawn their information from a wide variety of sources, but the fields of Sociology, Psychology, Theology, Medicine and Social Work have been especially prominent in this regard. With the exception of Social Work, all of these professions have been dominated by men. Men have been the professors, the researchers, and the practitioners. Jessie Bernard, (1973) has referred to a "machismo factor" in sociological research. She has suggested that emphasis upon "hard data" in research

reflected a strong male bias. She has called for research on women in their own right, without reference to male standards. Her comments might well be applied to most of the social sciences that are relied upon for the training of marriage counselors.

When Rossi examined academic departments of Sociology, she found women making up 33% of the graduate students - suggesting a strong interest on the part of females in the field. Yet women composed only 15% of faculty and research appointments in these departments, indicating that while women were interested in Sociology, a variety of barriers existed to their exerting an influence in the field that was proportionate to their numbers as students. When she compared male and female faculty in Sociology departments, Rossi (1970) found women less likely to be full-time faculty, less likely to hold joint appointments, less likely to hold higher faculty rank, and more likely to be teaching undergraduate courses rather than the more prestigious graduate ones.

Psychology reveals similar patterns of women being underrepresented in academia. One reason for this is suggested in the work of Fidell (1970) who studied sex discrimination in hiring practices in Psychology. Identical qualification descriptions were sent by Fidell to graduate Psychology programs in the U.S. in a purported study of career advancement possibilities for young Ph.Ds. The use of feminine or masculine first names and and proper pronouns were the only differences in the qualifications. Fidell's conclusion might be paraphrased that graduate academic departments of Psychology see men as more valuable and more likely to receive better appointments, hence a self-fulfilling prophesy may be said to exist.

Medicine has contributed many practitioners to marriage counseling. Its impact has been especially relevant in regard to the treatment and understanding of women by physicians. Gynecologists, 93% of whom are men, have been the medical specialists that almost all adult women have significant contracts with. Scully and Bart,

(1973) reviewing texts in gynecology, found that modern findings on women, especially in the area of sexuality and masculine-feminine roles, tended to be ignored and that traditional male sterotyped belief systems were perpetuated by physicians. Medical schools in the last decade made numerous strides in developing sex education for young physicians, but, in 1974, women still may reasonably expect their obstetrician-gynecologists, as well as their pedetricians, internists, and psychiatrists - all of whom are most likely to be males - to be deeply immersed in Nineteenth Century thinking, teaching, and understanding of women.

Marriage remains, for most people, a social institution with religious foundations. Theology, as previously noted, has served as one of the prime supporters of the male supremacy ethic throughout America's lengthly Judeo-Christian history. Continued opposition of the Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches to elevating women to the priesthood, Jewish opposition to female rabbis, and the dearth of female Protestant clergy all indicate that organized religion has shown few signs of significantly altering its traditional opposition to male-female equality. In spite of this, clergymen have constituted a significant proportion of marriage counselors and have been one of the first professional groups that couples and families turn to for help with their problems.

Social work has been the major exception in the helping professions to the usual male dominance patterns. Social workers, concentrating as they have done on treatment, usually to the exclusion of teaching and research, have been the mental health professional group doing the most marriage counseling. Until the late 1940s, social work was almost exclusively a female profession. Since that time the sex ratio has changed so that today almost one-third of professional social workers are men. (Meyer, 1971) Social work thus started later than the other professions in regard to the male-female supremacy issue on professional advancement. Today, however, the male social worker is more likely than his female counterpart to be employed full time, to be earning more money, to be advanced to positions of executive authority in

agencies, to be academic deans of professional schools, and to hold leadership positions in professional organizations. (Meyer, 1971) Casework practice, as carried on in family service agencies and other treatment settings, however, remains more likely to be done by female social workers.

Data on professionals who identify themselves only as "marriage counselors," has been difficult to access as most marriage counselors were cross-listed as social workers, clergy, psychologists, etc. One criterion open to study here is professional leadership as documented in the history of the American Association of Marriage Counselors. Since its founding thirty-two years ago in 1942, the AAMC had a woman president in office for five years while men have presided over the group for twenty-seven years. In 1962 the clinical membership of the AAMC was constituted of about 20% female members and 80% male members. By one decade later, in 1972, membership was made up of approximately 40% women and 60% men, indicating a change in the opposite direction from that taken by Social Work. (Note 1) Interestingly, three of the four women who served as AAMC Presidents did so at a time when the organization was overwhelmingly dominated in numbers by men, suggesting for this profession, at least, the willingness and ability to recognize women's talents even when they represented a clear minority. One suspects that a review of professional articles and books written by women in the field of marriage and family counseling might reveal their presence in much higher proportion than indicated by their numbers in the AAMC. This conclusion must be recognized as speculative at this time, however.

Implications for Marriage Counselors

In view of these changing roles for women - and their correlary changes for men - what are the present day implications for marriage counselors? First, it may safely be summarized that viewed in this historical context, women's roles - in marriage, in the family, and in society - <u>have</u> changed. These changes have been primarily in the direction of greater equality and greater freedom for American women in

almost all spheres of their lives. One may postulate, safely it would seem, that this change is only beginning to have its full force and effect felt. It will continue to grow and expand in the future.

Legal equality for women has been achieved in many areas through both legislative and judicial processes. The Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution which will guarantee sexual equality for men and women is moving towards acceptance by the states. Equal opportunity for women in employment is being enforced and numerous lawsuits on this have been brought in the courts. Of direct significance to marriage counselors, colleges and universities, the primary training centers for the profession, are being forced by the Federal government to correct imbalances and injustices for women faculty in regard to appointment, pay, and promotion. Marriage counselors in the future will have a higher probability of not only being women but of being taught and trained by women. Wives' financial dependence on their husbands has already decreased because of their advancements in pay and employment possibilities, in welfare and social security benefits and in pension plans. Equal pay for equal work today is more than a slogan - it is increasingly a fact. With the increase in wives working outside of their homes, many husbands are now dependent upon their wives' income to maintain the family budget - with a resultant shift in power between the spouses. Organized religion continues to lose its grip on matters relating to birth control, sexuality, and divorce. God is still a "He" but ardent Feminists might suggest a transexual operation could rectify that!

Currently we are witnessing women's movements struggling for power to be recognized as "the" spokespersons for women - but their struggle is often with each other - moreso than with males - over their right to exist and to seek equality. In the mass media, which may or may not be representative of our times, - even Edith Bunker of TV's "All In The Family" fame is challenging that male chauvinist pig, Archie Bunker, over her right to work and to get involved in the women's movement.

Family size and birthrates continue to fall, freeing women from forced mother-

hood and involuntary servitude within their homes. Contraception methods continue to be improved and male sterilization has increased several hundred fold in the past half decade. The argument is no longer whether woman can or cannot reach an orgasm - or whether it will be a clitoral or vaginal orgasm - but rather how many orgasms can she have. Males unequal to this task face increased competition from lovers of both sexes - or with electrical vibrators. Husband-wife democratic equalitarianism is occurring not just among newly marrieds but among middle aged couples. Women and men alike can choose among eighteen to twenty alternative life styles, from heterosexual cohabitation to homosexual marriage to increasing serial monogamy - and even to socially approved life-long chosen singlehood. If these changes do not justify the label of a revolution in the field of marriage and family life, they would at least appear to describe a rapid acceleration of evolutionary changes.

Marriage counselors not only must be aware of these changes - they must accept and affirm them. Marriage counseling demands that counselors be reality oriented. Those counselors who seek to deny or to fight change - rather than affirm and assist change - risk not only harming their clients, they risk losing them. This has practical, financial consequences for agencies and private practitioners alike.

Young people entering the profession of marriage and family counseling must be trained not only in more effective treatment modalities, they must be trained in marriage <u>as it is</u> - not as hallowed sexist traditions and romanticized myths would purport it to be. Older marriage counselors must receive in-service training - at conventions, at workshops, or at our universities - so that they may be retrained into todays world. Professional organizations in the marriage and family counseling fields must increasingly provide women with equal say and responsibilities in their efforts. Counselors as individual members of their own marriages and families must personally exemplify modern standards of equality between themselves and their spouses. Clinicians, researchers, and academicians must join together in supporting and per-

forming research in regard to women. This research, in order to overcome the limitations of the past - must be designed so as to be as free of sexual bias as is possible.

Finally, one thing Americans should have learned - and learned well - from women's struggles and from their changing roles, is that we need to search ever more deligently for the sources and the ways of effecting better human relations. For, in the final analysis, it is not whether a person is a male or a female that counts, it is whether or not that human being is a happy, healthy, constructive member of our modern society. Only when each and every human being - regardless of sex - has achieved his or her maximum individual development can marriage counselors feel they have achieved their assigned goals in the modern world.

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